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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the changing nature of leadership in community colleges focuses on the qualities of college presidents, the environment in which the college president operates, the relationship between the president and the college board, and ways of strengthening the presidency. First, the benefits and liabilities of the job of college president are discussed in the context of the high turn-over rate among presidents and declining interest in the job among other college administrators. Then, the relationship between the college board and president is discussed, with focus on the hiring process, the development of the president's employment contract, and problems that may occur during the transition to a new president. The next section examines the environment in which the president operates, looking at external and internal forces affecting the presidency. The paper then addresses three trends that have influenced the role of the president over the past 20 years; i.e., the changing role of spouses, the emergence of multicampus systems, and collective bargaining. The following sections discuss the respective responsibilities of the college board and the president, and the new skills and qualities that are required of today's chief administrators. Finally, a humorous account of the conflicting expectations of college presidents is presented. (HB)

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STRENGTHENING THE PRESIDENCY

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Paper presented at the 64th Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Washington, D. C., April 1-4, 1984.

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JC 840 195

Remarks by Dr. Leslie Koltai
AACJC 64th Annual Convention
Forum - Strenghthening the
Presidency

INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges has quite appropriately focused on quality education for a learning society during this conference, and I believe that no issue is more central to that concept than the changing role of the college president.

There have been many factors that, together, have created a vastly different presidential environment than that which we knew in the past -- an environment that will have a tremendous influence on the ways in which our colleges adapt and change during the years ahead.

As a member of the National Commission on Presidential Leadership of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, I have been working with the undisputed dean of American educators, Clark Kerr, on a project focusing on the changing nature of leadership in this country's postsecondary educational institutions.

As part of this project, we have been conducting a series of more than 700 interviews with chief executive officers of colleges and universities in order to solicit observations on a variety of issues relating to the changing role of the president.

In my remarks today, I will draw upon observations I have made based upon my participation in this study.

In addition, I have read the manuscript of a soon-to-be-published book, Community College Leaders for Tomorrow, edited by Richard Alfred and Paul Elsner, who are both reactors on today's panel, as well as Chancellor Jan Le Croy of the Dallas Community College District, and his assistant, Nancy Armes.

A review of the literature also revealed some interesting insights, to which I have added my observations from 16 years as Chancellor of multi-campus systems, in which I have filled approximately 30 presidencies and reviewed the background of approximately 500 candidates.

In my presentation today, I will not present a formal set of recommendations on strengthening the presidency. Each institution will obviously need to evaluate itself in this regard. But I would like to share my perceptions about this dynamic position -- and the people who assume it.

THE PRESIDENCY

The concern about the quality of the presidency has transcended the academy and now involves American society, in general.

There is concern about the relatively high turn-over rate of presidents -- and the fact that many of those who would traditionally have been applying for the presidency -- the deans, vice presidents, etc. -- are no longer interested in the job.

Many people talk about the tremendous price a president pays for the job -- the price to the family, to one's personal life, to one's time and stamina.

But there are also tremendous benefits and rewards, as well:

- The sense of accomplishing something of value to society
- The intellectual stimulation and challenge of a very demanding job
- The opportunity to work with other educators on important issues
- The chance to implement educational concepts you believe in.

The chief liabilities of the job include:

- The tremendous time pressures
- The ever changing crises
- The conflicts between various special interest groups that require mediation of one sort or another
- The frustration of decreasing resources to meet increasing student needs
- And the frustration of being seen as an adversary by those with whom you wish to be on the same team.

As a matter of fact, the eleventh president of Harvard said on his deathbed, "If any man wishes to be humbled and mortified, let him become President of Harvard College."

Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame says that the presidents who do not succeed often fail because of lack of humanity.

It is vital to earn -- and to keep -- the loyalty of those with whom we work.

It is vital to have credibility -- to deserve the trust of those rely upon the president for information, for decisions, for leadership.

THE BOARD/CANDIDATE RELATIONSHIP

Suggestions to the Candidate

Here's some advice if you're thinking about applying for the presidency:

- Be lucky -- in terms of time and place.
- Don't promise too much in advance.
- Don't give all of your heart to the institution -- if you do, you may lose it.
- Be ready to fight -- but only fight for what you are willing to die for.
- "Don't cackle like a hen every time you have laid an egg."
- Be lucky in terms of having a good governor or a good Board chair. (AGB)

Suggestions to the Board

The Board needs to keep certain criteria in mind when evaluating presidential candidates:

- Do they have the level of physical endurance needed?
- Do they have the degree of psychological resiliency needed?
- Do they have a family situation compatible with the job?

- Are they willing to live in the midst of ambiguity and conflict?
- Are they willing to give pain for the sake of progress?
- Do they have patience?
- Are they willing to associate with people not of their choosing?
- Are they willing to live with a changed relationship with faculty?

Some Boards look for a presidential candidate who has never been involved in controversy. But the individual who has never been controversial just might be the individual who has never taken any risks, or who has never really accomplished anything.

Development of the Contract

The AGB report says that one of the most important steps in ensuring the strength of the presidency is the correct handling of entrance to that position. And yet, the report says this is usually the most neglected aspect of the position.

Too much is generally left unsaid or implied concerning expectations and the relationship of the Board to the president. Unfortunately, this leads to problems which could be avoided, if the president had been specifically advised as to what the Board expected. The president needs to know what freedom and

support he or she can anticipate from the Board, what kind of review and/or evaluation process will be followed, and any other aspects that will make dealing with the Board more efficient and more effective.

The AGB report points out that community colleges often lead the way with educational innovations -- and notes that this area is no exception.

Many community colleges have now gone beyond the traditional "hope and pray" approach and have formal contracts for their presidents. These documents spell out, in detail, the various conditions of the position -- including a complete job description, information about any review and evaluation, and even the conditions and provisions for exit. "In fact, one college has even gone so far as to provide for arbitration if a president wants to protest dismissal," the report says.

Of course, CEOs in industry usually have contracts, but this development is new to educational institutions.

Some educational institutions have even initiated contractual arrangements with the spouse of the president -- which is important, considering the fact that many spouses report that no one ever even talked to them about what was expected of them.

At some institutions, there are arrangements made for entertaining, but the new approach of a contract for the spouse recognizes that the demands on this individual are many and perhaps should be compensated.

During Transition to a New President

During transition to a new president:

- Problems are created by an acting president who may not wish to relinquish authority, or by groups seeking to influence that individual.
- The search process is damaged when the media begin to examine candidates, placing them under public scrutiny. There is a real conflict here, because the public has the right to know, but many candidates refuse to put themselves in that situation and/or are subjected to demands by special interest groups.

The report says it takes about two years for a president to get established on the job -- and adds that it generally takes less time in a community college. And the last year of a term is generally not too effective. So, therefore, the most productive years are those in between the two-year breaking in period and the one-year "getting ready to leave period."

The Environment of the '80's

"There is a spreading perception that the presidency is not an attractive appointment."

On a national scale in two- and four-year institutions, there are indicators of the fact that a probler exists:

- Turnover among presidents was 28% in 1980-82. Only about 1/5 of presidents now continue beyond 10 years in the same position.
- It has become more difficult to interest potential appointees in the position. In fact, many deans and vice presidents think that their jobs are better than the president's -- they say that they can deal more with issues of educational substance, while the president deals more with external issues.
- Many boards feel that their presidents are not adequately preparing their institutions for the challenges ahead.
- College presidents are less able to influence the direction of their institutions than in the past.

Because of such high turnover, boards begin to depend upon the second line of administration, which they believe will be around longer.

But does this, in fact, become a self-fulfilling prophesy, since it undermines the authority of the president and gets in the way of good communication between the board and the president.

There are tremendous pressures -- and complexities -- involved in being a college president today.

There are many who think it's their role to criticize the president:

- Students
- Faculty
- The Media
- Staff
- Staff Officials or Governmental Agencies

There are external and internal influences:

Influences

External

- More federal laws and regulations
- More participation by the courts
- More state control over budgets
- More investigative activity by the media
- More efforts by special interest groups to influence decisions
- More "sunshine" laws and practices brought about by the above.

Internal

- Increase in faculty control over appointments and promotions, as well as academic policy
- Unionization, which covers about 25% of all faculty

- Boards are involved in more specific decision-making instead of broad policy formation. Boards also respond to special interests and external constituencies.
- Greater student participation in decision-making.
- Participatory democracy -- and the assumption by various groups that they have the power of veto.

Other Influences

Also, broad circumstances that are neither internal nor external:

- End of growth has meant fewer new institutions and therefore less money that is not otherwise committed.
- End of growth also means that presidents have not the enormous influence they have during a "boom time."
- Nationwide rejection of authority and increase of suspicion.
- Colleges are larger and more complicated, making it more difficult for the president to keep tabs on various activities, departments, trends, etc.

It is worth noting that presidential influence is greatest during a period of growth, but it is also high during a period of decline, when "no one else wants to take credit for the decisions." The president has the least influence during the steady state.

THE PAST 20 YEARS

The AGB Study noted that the past 20 years have brought three distinct trends that have dramatically influenced the role of the president:

- The changing role of spouses
- The emergence of multi-campus systems
- And collective bargaining

Changing Role of Spouses

An increasing number of presidential spouses have their own careers, and an increasing number are men. The spouse now makes greater demands on the president's time and is less available to assist the president in meeting his or her own duties. "So what was once a two-person job has become a 1.2 person job or a 1.0 person job, or even an 0.9 person job, as the spouse makes greater personal demands on the president, taking time and attention. . . . It cannot be expected that 0.9 of a presidency can accomplish as much as a 2.0 of a presidency," the AGB report observes.

And there is often a problem because the Board does not spell out the role of the spouse which, as the report says, can no longer be taken for granted.

Multi-Campus System

There are more multi-campus systems, which produce more conflicts between presidents and system heads. About half of all public campuses are within systems.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Multi-Campus Systems

- President can focus more on campus activities rather than worrying about the Board;
- President doesn't have to compete with other institutions for funds and students;
- Transition is easier upon entering job.

However:

- Difficult problems might be dumped on president;
- There might be battles over authority;
- Board members might have particular interests in specific campuses.

Collective Bargaining

The third development is unionization. This creates another group with which to deal. Senates usually continue, as well, and there are often confusing spheres of influence. Relationships become more confrontational, and the president's ability to act is restricted.

In fact, collective bargaining has brought about an entirely new relationship between the president, top administrators and the faculty.

People traditionally see their "leaders" as the individuals who assist them in times of trouble. Collective bargaining has placed a new individual in that role -- someone the faculty members now often look to for assistance, guidance and leadership.

Also, in situations in which there has been an adversarial collective bargaining situation, it is difficult to overcome the antagonism that has developed in the bargaining process.

Some observers also say that the relationship of presidents and line administrators has also begun to follow the mode of collective bargaining relationships in addressing disagreements.

And, collective bargaining sometimes causes lower-level administrators to move toward the faculty, in terms of their identity and organizational loyalty.

This is particularly true in times of retrenchment, since those administrators fear -- whether correctly or incorrectly -- that they will soon be re-joining the faculty.

In addition, collective bargaining has limited the free flow of communication which once existed between faculty and the president. There is danger for the president in becoming

isolated from ideas, from problems, from other points of view. And there is danger in having the faculty feel estranged from the decision-making function.

THE BOARD-PRESIDENT RELATIONSHIP

The AGB report emphasizes that the relationship between the Board and the president is the most important relationship in the institution, and it observes that the primary concern of the president should be to assist the Board in making good decisions.

The Board's responsibilities include assuring:

- That conditions for an effective presidency exist;
- That the president is carefully selected;
- That the president's entrance is carefully handled;
- That the president is adequately supported;
- That the president's evaluation is handled with sensitivity;
- And that termination, should it occur, be considerately handled.

The Board has a responsibility to make the presidency attractive to the incumbent and to potential appointees. However, the realities are that:

- Management of decline is not attractive;
- Participatory democracy makes it difficult to get anything done;
- The demands of long hours are not attractive;
- The role is often mainly external, which is frustrating;
- The demands on personal and family life are great.

The book I mentioned earlier -- Community College Leaders for Tomorrow -- provides some very valuable insights on the presidency. It analyzes the environment for leadership, as well as various leadership styles.

Alfred sees leadership as a function of the match between the individual, the institution and the environment.

He adds that the crisis is not only due to the skills -- or lack thereof -- of the CEO, but also reflects the requisites of the position itself.

Alfred says the CEO must be able to find balances:

- Between cooperation and competition with other institutions,

- Between immediate response versus delayed response to special interest groups,
- Between variable versus common core academic programs,
- And between organizational stability and organizational change.

As financial, political, legal and other such forces continue to influence the presidency, there is a great deal of discussion about the difference between the CEO as an educational leader and as an institutional administrator.

I perceive an educational leader to be a good manager, but also an expert in the subtle aspects of educational policy-making and implementation. An institutional leader could be one whose expertise lies more in the realm of efficient, productive operation of his/her institution -- whether the institution is a hospital, a corporation, a college or a university.

An educational leader's priorities have traditionally been:

- To take the initiative in shaping the purpose of the institution;
- To stimulate and facilitate the work of the faculty;
- To provide a positive image of the institution to those outside of it;

- To administer the affairs of the institution in a business-like manner;
- To secure funds and facilities to make the institution grow and prosper.

Among these priorities the faculty relationship is the most difficult one. For example, Professor Richard Richardson wrote: "Working with faculty committed to performing services for which there is no longer adequate demand, may be the single most difficult challenge administrators will face in the next ten years."

He added that, "Keeping those who are not promoted in the trenches as effective contributors, will constitute a challenge second only to the problem of renewing faculty."

We must remember that many of the chief executive officers now in office are products of the 1950s and '60s -- their management style may or may not be appropriate to the problems of today. Richardson notes that they often favor the "simple administrative structure" -- one in which central decision-making is in their hands.

He says:

"For many community colleges, movement away from the simple structure, increasingly perceived as highly restrictive by the faculty, occurred only with the departure, voluntary or otherwise, of the chief executives who either founded colleges or presided over their periods of greatest growth."

New Skills Needed

Obviously, the skills needed for presidents today are vastly different from those needed by administrators who were leaders during the period of growth and expansion.

As Paul Elsner wrote, "Those who break new ground must excell in the areas of politics, conflict resolution, motivation, and response to external change."

In the book edited with Dick Alfred, Paul Elsner indicates that some leadership competencies can be taught, such as:

Taking of testimony, tactful interrogation of subordinates, management of conflict, management of coalitions, and management of issues.

In the Los Angeles Community College District, presidents (and other top administrators) are evaluated in terms of very precise criteria that cover a broad range of abilities and skills.

For example, there are the areas of:

° Accomplishments -- What has the president (administrator) really done?

What are the number and, more important, the quality of those accomplishments?

What is their timeliness?

° Knowledge about the job itself -- the depth, breadth and application of this knowledge.

° Problem Solving -- Let's face it, a great deal of the president's time is spent solving -- or preventing -- problems. He or she must be able to recognize problems before they happen, and must be able to involve others in their solutions.

° Adaptability to Change -- There are those who say this is the most important characteristic of a president, for nothing is as certain in our job as rapid and often unprecedented change. Flexibility, resourcefulness and creativity are important traits.

° Ability to Innovate -- but to innovate appropriately. Many presidents can come up with new ideas -- but we need new ideas that work.

° Judgment -- So much of the president's job involves intuition, common sense, and the ability to correctly perceive people and situations.

° Interpersonal skills -- The presidency is a people-oriented job, and the president must be able to motivate, inspire, admonish, persuade, and -- in other words -- handle people with tact, skill and consideration.

- Initiative and Decisiveness -- The president makes many decisions -- and must be able to defend those decisions, even under pressure. Therefore, they should be wise and thoughtful decisions -- arrived at with care and careful deliberation.

- Communication Skills -- Whether dealing one-on-one or in large groups, the president must be able to communicate clearly, effectively, and persuasively. Idealogy is fine, but it must be backed up with solid content. The president must inspire and, at the same time, facilitate the day-to-day.

- Managerial Qualities -- Planning -- not just for growth and expansion, but also for retrenchment -- for all sorts of eventualities is extremely important. The president must know how to develop and carry out a plan that includes a wide variety of eventualities. The president must be able to establish goals and objectives for the college, as well as for the various groups within the college community.

We must not forget that many community college administrators have spent their entire careers in colleges and universities -- without any other experience. Today, I believe that there are certain skills we can learn from business and industry. ... In the Los Angeles Community College District we have initiated a new program, working with a number of local corporations, to provide administrators with "hands-on" opportunities for corporate learning experiences.

First Interstate Bank, Pacific Telephone, The Southern California Gas Company, and TRW are among the companies that have expressed a willingness to provide our administrators with opportunities for learning the latest developments in strategic planning, financial planning, human resource and property management, and other areas vital to the management of our district.

WHAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE

Clark Kerr once observed that the president should be

- Firm yet gentle
- Sensitive to others yet insensitive to himself or herself
- Able to look to the past and the future, yet be firmly planted in the present
- Both visionary and sound, affable yet reflective, knowing the value of the dollar and yet realizing that good ideas cannot be bought.
- Inspiring in vision, yet cautious in action
- A person of principle yet able to make a deal
- With broad perspective but able to follow details
- A seeker of truth where the truth may not hurt too much
- A good American, but ready to criticize the status quo
- A source of public policy pronouncements when they do not reflect on his or her institution.

He said the president should sound like a mouse at home and look like a lion abroad, and added that the president is a marginal individual -- on the margin of many groups, many ideas, many endeavors, many characteristics. The president is a marginal individual -- and yet at the very center of the total process.

Perhaps the dilemma of the presidency is best summarized in the following essay; by Stuart Marsee.

THE JOY OF BEING A PRESIDENT

If they print a bulletin, it is a slick publication and an extravagance. If it is mimeographed, it is amateurish. They wonder if it is read in either case.

If they accept appointments on important national commissions, they are called "traveling presidents;" if not, they lack stature.

If they form a committee, they can't make decisions; if not, they're dictatorial.

If they have roll taken at meetings, they are not respecting the professionalism of the faculty; if not, the faculty are absent.

If an innovation in a program is successful, "why not?" If it fails, it's the president's fault.

If they say "yes," it is the way it should have been earlier; if the answer is "no," they're not interested in improvement.

If they visit classes and committee meetings, they are an intruder; if they don't, they're not interested.

If they recommend dismissal, the reasons are trivial; if not, their low standards are ruining the college.

If they are popular with the community and the Board, they are a politician; if not, they have poor public relations.

If they write a bulletin, they are trying to hoodwink the faculty; if not, their communications are poor.

If they have written policies, they live "by the book" and make no allowances for individual differences. If not, their decisions are inconsistent and no one knows what is expected of them.

So, in benediction:

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. After others have tried, the president must!

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